

**BACKGROUND FOR A DOUBLE
STAR 0**

that public opinion won the strike Cardinal Manning intervened on their side, two highly distinguished civil servants—Vaughan Nash and Hubert Llewelyn Smith—

wrote the history of the affair the thing had all the movement of an exciting drama But there was more in it than that Suddenly, people not previously interested in politics, became aware of what Carlyle had called, in a phrase to be revived in the opening years of the new century, "the condition of England question"⁵ Even in drawing-rooms, the word Socialism began to be muttered, although few as yet were prepared to say at all clearly what it meant

Very slowly did any of these influences percolate through to the world of professional politicians The Gladstonian Government that fell in 1886 was largely absorbed in non-domestic issues, like Egypt, South Africa, and, above all, Home Rule for Ireland It was further, from first to last, distracted by the bitter controversy arising out of the refusal of that stormy petrel, Charles Bradlaugh, to take the Oath Secularism, Birth Control, Socialism—Bradlaugh, with the able assistance of Annie Besant, powerfully confused the issues, and raised a prodigious dust of prejudice and passion Ireland, again, dominated the parliamentary scene throughout the life of the Conservative Government between 1886 and 1892. Those who were deeply stirred about social facts and economic issues became more and more exasperated, fell more and

more into revolt, inclined more and more to
cry "A plague
o' both your houses!" Something was
wrong, and it
was more deep seated than the orthodox
politician was
willing to see, but, given sight and will, it could
be righted.

In their different ways, this was the feeling
that was
burning in the mind of two remarkable young
people—

Sidney Webb, then a clerk in the Colonial
Office, and
Beatrice Potter, a young lady, nominally of
leisure, m a
mansion in Monmouthshire